

A Review on Review: The Value of *Minor Knowledge and Microhistory*.

Manuscript Culture in the Nineteenth Century

by

Sigurður Gylfi Magnússon and Davíð Ólafsson.

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Books should be read
at least once in full.
(Anonymous)

ABSTRACT

As important as book reviews are, *Minor Knowledge* attracted a less than helpful review from M.J. Driscoll. As a result, it gave rise to a re-evaluation of both: the review, and the book.

The alternative conclusion arrived at herein, is that the authors of *Minor Knowledge* succeeded rather well in placing several major revisionist reinterpretations of their field of study, on the research agenda by substantiating their far-reaching perspectives after thorough micro-historical analysis of the relevant sources.

A major benefit of this book, this debate argues, is the extent to which traditional and new microhistorical tenets can productively be applied to ‘other Histories’, e.g. to Micro- Enviro-history. The implication is that the most important benefits of *Minor Knowledge* are ‘outside’ the book *and* what lies ‘inside’ is commendable, achieved by two authors who will not be ‘locked down’.

Key words: barefoot historians, Micro- Enviro-history, in-between spaces, metalepsis. minor knowledge, revisionism, *rhizomic* networks, scribal community, singularization, transformative.

1 Introduction

This discussion is more about the benefits or value of S.G. Magnússon and D. Ólafsson's 2019 edition of *Minor Knowledge and Microhistory. Manuscript Culture in the Nineteenth Century*, (first issued in paperback) rather than being a traditional response to Driscoll's 2018 book review of *Minor Knowledge*. Naturally, benefits or value are relative.

Maybe my position herein should be stated upfront: *Minor Knowledge* is a useful if not an important publication. Why? Firstly, because in the words of (former Director-General of UNESCO) Irina Bokova (in ISSC, IDS and UNESCO 2016: 3):

Social science research agendas ... require revisiting. The [2016 World Social Science] Report calls for a step change towards a research agenda that is interdisciplinary, multiscale and globally inclusive, *creating pathways for transformative knowledge* (emphasis added).

This resembles Jürgen Habermas's (1974: 1) 'idea of a theory of society conceived with a practical intention....' Incidentally (some years earlier), in *What is Microhistory? Theory and Practice*, Magnússon and Szijártó (2013: i) undertook 'to offer practical instructions for those historians wishing to undertake micro-historical analysis.' This shows transformative intent as did Szijártó (in Erős *et al.* 2016: 191) when he wrote that 'no present action makes any sense if we have no intentions about the future.'

An appropriate starting point for studying *Minor Knowledge* is to outline its objectives which Magnússon and Ólafsson (2019: i) state on the half-title page as follows: the book 'studies the everyday writing practices among ordinary people in a poor rural society in the long nineteenth century.' They also announce a *longue durée* element in their investigation. A further objective is the focus on the day-to-day usage of handwritten material as well as "minor knowledge." Because they focus 'on the history of education and communication in a global perspective', the fifth objective is to show 'modern manuscript culture as a transnational (or transregional) practice....' In this respect, *Minor Knowledge* is full of references to, and examples of, *other* European countries. In doing so, the next objective is to give 'agency to its ordinary participants'. The authors also set out to devote attention to 'hitherto overlooked source material.' The eighth objective presents popular culture 'in a wider perspective, as well as asking questions about the importance of this development for continuity of the literary tradition.' The final objective explains 'the nature of the literary culture' in general, including how new ideas were transported amongst individuals, different communities, and regions, meaning *what* the role of minor knowledge in the development of modern humankind is.

Not only are these objectives of Magnússon and Ólafsson set out against a clear *revisionist approach*, but this book also ticks off the four arguments for Micro-history as outlined almost two decades ago by Sziijártó (2002: 209–215) as being interesting, communicating lived experience, is founded in real life, and it branches out very far. In fact, the view herein is that Magnússon’s revisionist stances can be traced back to his early doctoral student days at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh in the late-1980s and early 1990s (Magnússon 2001: 1).

Given the close proximity of Micro-history to Social Sciences (e.g. Social and Cultural Histories), *Minor Knowledge* aims to promote ‘transnational (or transregional) practice, giving agency to its ordinary participants’ that reflects ‘[d]iverse trends and turns in the historiography of the texts [that] add to a strong case for a *radical revision* of how these practices can be viewed’ (Magnússon and Ólafsson 2019: 1, emphasis added). In this process Magnússon and Ólafsson advance Bokova’s observations: their *revisionist approach does* create substantial pathways for transformative knowledge – as will become clearer herein.

As a result of being committed to revisionist historiography, Magnússon and Ólafsson (2019: 3) maintain that it is necessary to look ‘outside the conventional framework of historical research...’ For them

[o]nce we break out of the traditional boundaries and standardized processes of scholarship into unexplored areas of “local knowledge,” we can hope to come across material that may shed new light on institutional structures and thus force us to question our received and accepted notions of them (Magnússon and Ólafsson 2019: 4).

In searching for the ‘new’, Magnússon and Ólafsson (2019: 5–8) are also taking note of the wider macro-micro debates from their revisionist approach. For instance, in the Introduction and in Chapters 1–3 (Magnússon and Ólafsson 2019: 1–71), readers can find many references to historiographical revision and revisionist requirements. Reference to only a few, will suffice for now: ‘Revisionist approaches have included an emergent emphasis on *agency* as the capacity of individuals to act within the social structure that seems to limit or influence the opportunities that individuals have’ (Magnússon and Ólafsson 2019: 1, emphasis in original); or, ‘[b]y venturing off the beaten paths ... one can expect to find ... new angles of this field of studies’ (Magnússon and Ólafsson (2019: 7); or, ‘the well-established argument about Icelandic culture claiming its foundation to be exclusively based on Icelanders’ strong intellectual talent; harsh weather conditions; long, dark winters; and the unusual perseverance of its inhabitants—hardly holds water any more’ (Magnússon and Ólafsson 2019: 11. See also pp.17, 22, 26, 29, 31, 32 38, 56).

As a side comment, the question about the extent to which *Minor Knowledge* represents new directions in revisionist Micro-historical historiography, warrants a separate dedicated study in the historiography of Micro-history. There would be no harm done by putting such research question on trial. Why? Because Magnússon and Ólafsson (2019: 9) make (on more than one occasion) a profound claim, for example: ‘*Microhistory is one of the most significant innovations that have presented themselves in history in the course of the last decades*’ (emphasis added). The reality is that Magnússon and Szijártó (2013: i) also made this claim some seven years earlier – Micro-history is ‘*one of the most significant innovations in historical scholarship to have emerged in the last few decades*’ (emphasis added). But even a decade further back, Szijártó (2002: 209) made the same observation about Micro-history: ‘Today, microhistory is the flagship of contemporary social historians’ and fifteen years later Szijártó (2017: 197) formulated this conviction more comprehensively:

microhistory demonstrates its power to colonize other modes of analysis; or, more modestly, we can state that in humanities other than history, tendencies similar to the rise of microhistory can be felt and possibilities for interconnections and scholarly cooperation abound.’

Its microhistorical methodology has the capacity to influence other fields of study than the historical (Rion 2011), for example, economic history (Roberts 2011: 2).

Secondly, Driscoll’s review is less helpful because Bokova’s claim (although in a different context) that ‘too many studies are too narrow in focus’ (in ISSC, IDS and UNESCO 2016: 3), did not receive Driscoll’s attention. But in these is an important objective of this book: ‘to reflect the personal experiences’ from the ‘point of view of the individual’ (Szijártó 2012: 1). This is, after all, a key characteristic of the DNA of Micro-history.

The rest of this discussion is divided into two sections. The next section comments on Driscoll’s nevertheless important two-page review of *Minor Knowledge* in order to understand his perspective, and *Minor Knowledge*’s apparent shortcomings that flow from Driscoll’s review.

Section 3 rather concentrates on the *useful* interdisciplinary *gains* to be derived from *Minor Knowledge*, in this case, for Micro- Enviro-history’s epistemology. This is not a new argument: Recently, M.P.V. Franco (2018: 262, 271) hypothesized that ‘the micro historical approach [is] an adequate methodological tool to environmental history, anticipating a fruitful future for environmental microhistory’, and then concluded: that ‘microhistory can offer a sound epistemological and methodological framework to the research of environmental historians.’

This division of work for the purposes here, is a deliberate choice. Of course, *Minor Knowledge* is not a book about Enviro-history or Enviro– Micro-history (or even Micro- Enviro-history), but Icelandic

environmental conditions do feature (although in the background) in the broader narrative. This approach of Magnússon and Ólafsson's is productive to understand the general emphasis of Micro-history's focus on the small-scale.

2 Minor issues in *Minor Knowledge*

No written piece (including reviews, or reviews on review) has ever been, and never will be perfect or beyond critique which in itself, would be imperfect anyhow. Such limitation is a human condition and expectations to the contrary, are unreasonable. And just in case we have forgotten: 'Access to the past is always mediated, and, thus, always partial' Ginzburg (2013: xii) reminded us.

But 'sweating the small stuff' has become almost institutionalised in reviews. It is really irrelevant that the country's name, *Iceland*, is not on the cover, half-title, title, or copyright pages of this book. As Driscoll correctly points out. And yet, only two pages further, in the List of Figures, reference to *Iceland* appears sixteen times, and numerous times thereafter on practically every page throughout the entire book – should the reader considers it important. There can be no early misunderstanding that this book is *also* about *Iceland*. In fact, Driscoll thinks the book is too *Icelandic*. In other words, does the omission of the word *Iceland* where Driscoll expects it to be, detract from the entire project? No. Similarly, what is the use of the phrase 'But so it is' in this, the first of Driscoll's comments, or the bracketed comment 'in the way such things do'? (Driscoll 2018: 92). It would have been better if both comments were merely left out.

When Driscoll 'regularly' reaches for his red pen (he wrote), should I do the same because he refers to the publishers of *Wasteland with Words*, (Reaction Books), as Reaktion books (Driscoll 2019: 92) or the typo of Magnússon's book? If academics waste the authoritative allocation scarce academic resources, such as teaching, research, and writing *time*, on a few obvious editorial slips such as 'books' and not 'Books', and 'Magnússon's' and not 'Magnússon's', then small wonder that John Hughes (1987: 1) wrote thirty years ago that 'the social sciences have tended to re-examine their philosophical foundations *only during periods of crisis*' (emphasis added) because the tendency is to be reactive in many instances, or even being partly to blame for not keeping their sciences up-to-date. This is most likely because too much time is taken up by seeking important new 'turns' (Simon 2013: 184), or worse, by 'sweating the small stuff.' Or consider T.S. Kuhn (1970: viii) who wrote (already in the early 1950s) about the 'number and extent of the overt disagreements between social scientists about the nature of legitimate scientific problems and methods', or K.R. Popper (2007: 1) who maintained that 'the social sciences do not as yet seem to have found their Galileo.' Instead, but far more importantly, Leach *et al.* (in ISSC, IDS and UNESCO 2016: 31) are also of the view that 'there is a need for a transformative social science' and therefore the substantive points of critique should be more about *that*. Did

Magnússon and Ólafsson bring revisionism to the agenda not? Of course, they did. Many times, to say the least.

Equally important, when Driscoll (2019: 92) writes that ‘compiling and copying of texts of every imaginable kind, seemingly in most cases, solely for their (meaning the members of the scribal community) *own amusement* and that of the members of their households’ (emphasis added), he then misses the point about barefoot historians. This is conceptually wrong, because

it is maintained here [in *Minor Knowledge*] that it is a misleading perspective to analyze production, transmission, and use of texts in the early modern and modern age solely on the basis of the economics of mass production. The slow but convenient option of transmitting or collecting reading material in handwritten form continued to play an important role for communities, social groups, individuals, and for certain types of text, where print was inappropriate or not available (Magnússon and Ólafsson 2019: 50).

There are further instances where I would use my laptop’s keys in red font. When Driscoll (2019: 91) ‘find[s] the book so focussed on Iceland’ (emphasis added), one needs to rather keep in mind that Chapter 1 deals largely with *Anglo-Saxon* thinking and Chapter 2 with *Pan-European* thinking *beyond* the *European* – meaning, there are already *two* chapters that do not deal with Iceland. And whilst my ‘red pen’ is at hand, Driscoll’s overly long sentences in paragraph 1, 2, 3 and 5 are unnecessary. It is comments like these, that do not take the *substantive debate* forward.

But Driscoll (2019: 91) is quite correct. This book does provide ‘a welcome opportunity for non-Icelandic readers to familiarize themselves’ with a fascinating subject. My view is that much can be gained from the ‘Icelandicisms abound’, *and* similarly from ‘the picture of a pile of medieval Icelandic manuscripts on page 12’ (Driscoll 2018: 92). And for those researchers not working with medieval Icelandic manuscripts every day (like myself, who never has, and sadly, probable never will), I thought that a visual thereof, such as on page 12, is quite informative, if not necessary for the purposes of *Minor Knowledge*. I wonder what ‘obvious function’ Driscoll had in mind or expected for the picture on page 12 to fulfil? As a matter of fact, having to work with such manuscripts, must have been taxing when considered against significant micro-historical characteristics such as close scrutiny, and intense analysis of long-ago handwritten and bulky documents.

And yet, it remains difficult to get good grades from Driscoll. Only this time his red pen must have underlined: ‘there is not a single mention of Iceland’s medieval manuscripts in the book’ (Driscoll 2018: 92) of his own note. Well, *Minor History* was already marked down for being ‘so focused on Iceland’ (Driscoll 2018: 91, emphasis added) and to have also dealt in detail with Iceland’s medieval manuscripts

might have attracted more red ink. But more importantly, I read: ‘The advent of the New philology around 1990 heralded new approaches to medieval manuscripts, and it has also had a great influence on research on latter day manuscripts and their cultural history’ (Magnússon and Ólafsson 2019: 23). In this context, reference to *Iceland* is not required. But again, of greater importance is the attention that Magnússon and Ólafsson draw to earlier research by Peter Beal. This time Magnússon and Ólafsson (2019: 29–30) explain:

The clear boundary which had been drawn between the era of (medieval) manuscript culture and print culture (early modern and modern period) had thus been called into question at the end of the twentieth century while at the same time scholars in various disciplines and in many countries became more interested in those aspects of literary history which are concerned with transmission and use of texts by informal means.

This should be read next to the following (while still keeping in mind the objectives of *Minor History*, of being revisionist):

These, and other diverse processes and narratives from the realm of textual transmissions from the Middle Ages into the twentieth century, demonstrate the limitations of the sweeping central-European paradigm of a swift print revolution following Gutenberg’s invention (Magnússon and Ólafsson 2019: 48).

Readers of *Minor Knowledge*, who did not know, now do know (by default) what old manuscripts look like (Magnússon and Ólafsson 2019: 12) *and* that

[t]he church had been the main operator of educational institutions in Iceland from the Middle Ages up to the end of the eighteenth century when the schools run at the bishoprics of Skálholt and Hólar were closed down (Magnússon and Ólafsson 2019: 90).

In this sense, readers can put Driscoll’s worry about a lack of reference to Iceland’s medieval manuscripts, at ease. One way of doing this, is to refer to end notes 23 and 24 of Chapter 6 (Magnússon and Ólafsson 2019: 112, 119).

As for the ‘infelicitous word choices’ (Driscoll 2018: 92), which are a matter of opinion, as is Driscoll’s use of, for example, ‘sedulously’ or ‘pejoratively’ (Driscoll 2018: 92) are in my view, the terrain of ‘professorial prerogative’, on which I want to dwell somewhat.

Although the Icelandic word *alþýðufræðimenn* might mean ‘lay scholars’ in English and that *alþýða* might mean common or ordinary people, but that Magnússon and Ólafsson refer to them as ‘barefoot historians’, that is, derived from the German word *barfußhistoriker* ‘which was used, almost exclusively pejoratively, starting in the 80s to refer to amateur local historians’, does *not* make it ‘entirely inappropriate in the Icelandic context’ as Driscoll (2018: 92) maintains. This is a conceptual error which shows ‘how we talk past one another’. Incidentally, in the mid-1920s Max Horkheimer (1978: 17) wrote about same thing: ‘Men relate to each other, talk to each other, deal with each other, persecute each other, yet they do not see each other.’ Also, in this regard, the English historian E.H. Carr’s (1974: 16) following three sentences in the early 1960s remain ever-green reminders when he wrote:

No document can tell us more than what the author of the document thought – what he thought had happened, what he thought ought to happen or would happen, or perhaps only what he wanted others to think he thought, or even only what he himself thought he thought. None of this means anything until the historian has got to work on it and deciphered it. The facts, whether found in documents or not, have still to be processed by the historian before he can make use of them....

This problem is also found in Driscoll’s view of ‘the sheer incongruity of the idea of going barefoot in Iceland’ (Driscoll 2018: 92) as if Magnússon and Ólafsson created the impression (or even insinuated, let alone hinted) that barefoot historians went about their business barefoot in Iceland. So, when Driscoll is of the view that Magnússon and Ólafsson refer to barefoot historians pejoratively, then disagreement sets in again. In fact, a closer read of *Minor Knowledge* reveals precisely the opposite: the authors’ warmth, understanding and empathy, let alone respect and admiration for barefoot historians as members of the scribal community, can hardly be overlooked throughout this book.

In addition, there should be no misunderstanding about a small but important piece of clothing of barefoot historians that one might take for granted – shoes. In a detailed study of a working-class women, Magnússon (2011: 14) wrote that in ‘the spring of 1915 Elka [Björnsdóttir] was able to buy herself shoes for the first time in seven years.’ She was 34 years old. What *we also do know* is that ‘[m]ost clothes were made of wool. However, woollen clothes are of course warm but, of limited effectiveness in the damp and rainy climate in Iceland. *Shoes were made of sheepskin. Sewn at home*

by hand, they offered only minimal protection against the elements’ (Magnússon and Ólafsson 2019: 85, emphasis added).

Why is such seemingly trivial detail important? Because the canons of Micro-history require that micro-historians

approach the logical structure of a study of a small unit differently from macrohistorical analysis ... The method applied in microhistory is termed the “evidential paradigm.” The premise is that a study of a small unit requires minute analysis of signs and clues in the sources, and that in gathering sources and evidence that objective must be taken into account, by “reading into” the text and deconstructing the position of the people concerned (Magnússon and Ólafsson 2019: 58).

Professor T.V. Cohen (2012: 1) puts this as follows: ‘We [microhistorians] squeeze our sources hard, we read for nuance, we listen carefully to language, we crawl into and even behind our sources.’ Magnússon and Ólafsson succeed well at this.

Driscoll’s idea (2018: 92, emphasis added) that ‘[o]ne *almost* gets the impression’, is puzzling – you either have an impression or not – it is like sickness, you either are, or are not sick. But more importantly: that ‘[m]uch of it is recycled ... has appeared in English before’ even in *Wasteland with Words*, would probably be no different from the practice of PhDs ending up in a book, recycled, and mostly in the same language, thus very recognizable not only to the critic. But such is the nature of the beast. Again, Magnússon and Ólafsson (2019: ix) made it clear in their Acknowledgements, that parts of their arguments have previously been published, and that Magnússon has previously reworked some material of *Wasteland with Words*. There are obvious reasons for having done so. It is sometimes even desirable. A possible reason for why Magnússon used previously reworked and previously printed material, is to connect earlier research with new material as well as having to ‘fill in and flesh out’ the *Minor Knowledge* narrative with some old but mostly new. Some repetition is inevitable.

If one considers that ‘[t]his book studies everyday writing practices among ordinary people in a poor rural society in the long nineteenth century [and] how new ideas were transported from one person to another, from community to community, and between regions’ (Magnússon and Ólafsson 2019: i) by means of these clumsy medieval Icelandic manuscripts, and how barefoot historians have gone about their work, then it also becomes important to understand the physical *circumstances* under which they toiled. Therefore, the inclusion of the section of housing and a further section on hygienic and health conditions of *where* and *how* they lived, are, to say the least, essential, if not a minimum requirement in this project. How else would the reader know what to skip reading if anything at all? But Driscoll

(2018: 92) argues otherwise: ‘certainly the relevance to the book as a whole of the section on housing and personal hygiene in chapter 4 is hard to see....’ This is unfortunate, because the implication is that if it is hard to see the relevance ‘of the section on housing and personal hygiene’, then one reduces the vast opportunities of points of entry towards understanding environmental influences (if one so wishes) on their work, and legacies of barefoot historians. And that is tantamount to not fully considering the ‘conceptual framework’ of *Minor Knowledge*.

But this problem with the ‘relevance’ of housing, hygiene and health in Chapter 4, dates to the last two lines of Driscoll’s review on page 91. In these two lines, the importance of Chapter 3, receives practically no attention from Driscoll. This may be one of the reasons why it is hard to see the relevance of housing and personal hygiene for the entire book. But *Chapter 3 provides the basis for work in Chapter 4, specifically with reference to housing, hygiene and health*. When Magnússon and Ólafsson (2019: 55–57) briefly summarize the two major changes of history in the 20th century, and specifically the *influence* thereof on and *relation* to microhistory, how the structure of society reflects on the social system, and how ‘historians started to pay attention to facts that recurred, ... [including how] in due course subjective issues attracted the attention of social historians’ [to start studying issues such as] ‘death, emotional life, love, and stench’ (Magnússon and Ólafsson 2019: 55), then we are in the middle of the importance of e.g. housing, hygiene and health. After all, housing, hygiene, and health are closely interrelated everyday issues, not only in the lives of barefoot historians, but also in the lives of their audiences:

bad housing = bad hygiene and health, but good hygiene and health need good housing.

In fact, from the fractals of death, emotional life, love, and stench, comes the need for exactly that: for good housing, hygiene, and health. That these factors ‘affected people’s [everyday lives]’ (Magnússon and Ólafsson 2019: 56), is known from ‘personal testimony—as manifested for instance in ego-documents’ (Magnússon and Ólafsson 2019: 57) but also from E.P. Thompson’s (1963) study of the English working class.

But there are many micro-historical principles why housing and personal hygiene are important to be studied, and therefore to have found their rightful places in this book. It is generally accepted that historically, Micro-history has developed from and in reaction to, social history the extent that it has gained respect in both Social and Cultural history (Magnússon and Ólafsson 2019: 57; Magnússon and Szijártó 2013). Thus, Micro-history, having gained from the *cultural turn*, is well-positioned to, not only reflect on ‘a certain fixed structure of society’, but also to gain ‘[k]nowledge of the nature of relationships of individuals within a family in past times’ (Magnússon and Ólafsson 2019: 55, 57). This is because

[m]icrohistory pursues the idea that a small unit (an individual, event, or small community) can reflect a larger whole and how such an approach differs from the quantitative methods that are typical of phenomena such as demography within the discipline of social history (Magnússon and Ólafsson 2019: 57, 58).

The housing conditions, together with that of hygiene and health, were presented in *Minor Knowledge* against the following context. Firstly, during ‘the long nineteenth century Iceland was still thinly populated by a predominantly peasant society, as it had been since it was settled one thousand years earlier’ (Magnússon and Ólafsson 2019; 76). Secondly, only

[d]uring the latter part of the nineteenth century the social structure of rural Iceland faced considerable change, especially after 1860 when the farming community came under pressure to support its steadily growing population. Radical changes in the formal structure of society can have a deep effect not only on people’s general outlook but also on the directions they choose to take throughout their lives (Magnússon and Ólafsson 2019: 76).

The question in a nutshell is: What were the housing conditions like in the context of *Minor Knowledge*? Magnússon and Ólafsson refer to work done by John F. West (in Magnússon and Ólafsson 2019: 87, note 5) that the situation was ‘wretched ... for much of the eighteenth century the country had suffered a succession of volcanic eruptions, crop failures, famines, and epidemics, notably smallpox’ (Magnússon and Ólafsson 2019: 77). They continue: ‘Perhaps the most striking feature of housing in Iceland during most of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and even well into the twentieth, was its woeful inadequacy’ (Magnússon and Ólafsson 2019: 79). As an example: a recurring ‘problem of the poor housing was water seepage into the living quarters’ and contemporary autobiographies ‘commented on the wretched quality of the housing and the hardships suffered as a result of poor insulation ... poverty and fuel’ (Magnússon and Ólafsson 2019: 81). In one specific instance: ‘As a result, Karvel’s father was ill throughout the winter, and the rest of the family suffered swollen hands and feet, that is, frostbite’ (Magnússon and Ólafsson 2019: 81).

According to Magnússon and Ólafsson (2019: 82) numerous autobiographies recorded the ‘damaging consequences of the combination of bad housing, cold climate, and the lack of hygiene....’ The following (again too long) citation gives apt descriptions and creates a conducive atmosphere to enhance understanding of the lived circumstances and experiences that must have been endured for prolonged periods:

In brief, it is hardly an unfair generalization to say that the homes of most people in Iceland exhibited a state of overwhelming squalor. Lighting and ventilation were limited, and baths taken irregularly. Lice were an unwelcome guest that it was hard to avoid, and scalps disfigured with sores and the accompanying rampant bacterial growth were a common sight. Dogs and other domestic animals roamed freely around the house, licking up leftover food from people's plates, and facilities for waste removal and disposal of excreta were few and rudimentary (Magnússon and Ólafsson 2019: 84).

However, and '[d]espite gradual improvements [in the long nineteenth century], poor housing and sanitary conditions continued to foster a range of *diseases that decimated families and whole communities*' (Magnússon and Ólafsson 2019: 85, emphasis added).

The micro-historical notion of *normal exception* makes the household, hygiene, and health circumstances particularly relevant and valuable in *Minor Knowledge* since much of it is based on personal testimony through a variety of fragmented sources which ended up in valuable manuscripts. The relationship between people and text must have been deeply influenced by their household and personal health conditions. In many instances, deriving knowledge from signs and clues – the so-called *evidential paradigm* – underlines the 'representativeness' of self-expression by the scribes. The focus on household and hygienic conditions, are examples of what Magnússon (2003) termed the *singularization of history*. More interestingly, the desire to learn, read, write, communicate, building linkages and networks, emphasizes the principle of *far-reaching history*, not only far in terms of relative geo-political distance, but, paradoxically, from the ground up, and horizontally between *rhizomic* networks.

This is a book about the 'everyday writing practices among ordinary people in a poor rural society in the long nineteenth century' based 'on text matter originating and rooted primarily in the everyday life of the peasantry' (Magnússon and Ólafsson 2019: i). This by itself, makes understanding of housing, hygiene and health conditions imperative. In this lies an added advantage of *Minor Knowledge*: for Micro- Enviro-history. There is reason to believe that the revisionist approach (comments about which I did not pick up in Driscoll's review) that Magnússon and Ólafsson (2019: 4) allude to a number of times in *Minor Knowledge*, does not stand in isolation relative to for instance, Magnússon's (2006: 1–21) view of the institutionalization of history.

It is therefore no surprise that Magnússon and Ólafsson (2019: 76) wrote:

It is important to understand these circumstances since they had a major effect on the conditions the "barefoot historians" had to live with in working on their

chosen subjects. This is particularly important as our key protagonists lived in many ways of the cusp between the decline of early modern Iceland and slowly ascending modern society.

Despite improvements in the socio-economic conditions, '[t]he hardships described ... had a huge influence on people's ability to cope with the demands of day-to-day living ... go a long way in explaining why much of the material advice literature was of limited value and had little effect.... But their culture was rooted in fertile soil, as is recounted in the next chapter, and on that they founded their visions of a better future' (Magnússon and Ólafsson 2019: 85–86). This is a clear link to the necessity of adequate housing, hygiene, and health conditions – if not for the rest of the book, then at least for Chapter 5.

3 A major issue in *Minor Knowledge*: useful interdisciplinary gains for Micro- Enviro-history

It is now necessary to link the mainly out of focus environmental issues with the rest of this discussion. In 2011 Strother E. Roberts (2011: 2) argued that 'microhistory has a good deal to offer environmental history.' He advanced four reasons: firstly, it puts people back in environmental history; it makes 'room for individual choices and personal agency'; it recognises the human impact on the environment, and lastly, it is 'difficult to write a "Great Man" environmental history.'

Important for this study is the following argument of Roberts (2011: 1):

In a sense, climate – whether local, regional, or global – provides the superstructure in which historical agents must act. Just as many previous microhistorians have demonstrated the degree to which cultures both shape and are shaped by individual decisions, microclimates shape the species that inhabit them while in some ways being shaped by the members of those species.

Similarly, a year later Cohen (2012, emphasis added) wrote that microhistory 'has a great deal to offer *historians of all sorts*. It has practices. It sets a model, both for analysis and for exposition.' Szijártó (2017: 194) agreed. In a sense '[c]ompletely different mental worlds, historic events ... are in for unexpected fusions' (Nowak 2013: 14).

In agreement with Cohen's optimism, this section suggests the potentially positive influences of *Minor Knowledge* on other historical disciplines, and for the purposes here, for Micro- Enviro-history. But this does not imply a positivist-like correspondence between Micro-history and Micro- Enviro-

history, but merely to borrow ‘practical realism’ from Szijártó (2008: 1) that is identifiable between their respective methodologies. A decade later, Szijártó (2018: 917; 926) had more to say about this when he wrote that Micro-history ‘riding the fence between social and cultural history, gives it exceptional chances in arriving at important historical understandings.’ This implies that Szijártó’s (2018: 917–927) use of the process of metalepsis, can be productively applied to use understandings from Micro-history, to the advantage of Micro- Enviro-history. This development needs further investigation in a separate study.

The value, therefore, of *Minor Knowledge* lies in the *relevance of the major arguments* throughout this book which can be applied cross-disciplinary. Magnússon and Ólafsson (2019: 4, 216) explain:

microhistory can make its greatest contribution to modern scholarship by moving out beyond the conventional framework of historiography into areas where knowledge that has remained relatively unknown to the world at large has flourished.

The argument is that Micro- Enviro-history falls into *this* category and can therefore benefit from Micro-history, because traditionally, Micro-history concentrated on the lives of subaltern people, mainly individuals, and small communities – the everyday activities of ordinary people, often in rural spaces, mostly in cultural or social contexts were the focus points. A clearer formulation is the following:

Microhistory pursues the idea that a small unit (and individual, event, or small community) can reflect a larger whole and how such an approach differs from the quantitative methods that are typical of phenomena such as historical demography within the discipline of social history (Magnússon and Ólafsson 2019: 58).

Consequently, the contention is that ‘minor knowledge’, meaning that ‘text matter originating and rooted primarily in the everyday life of the peasantry’ (Magnússon and Ólafsson 2019: i) is nowadays probably too restrictive. As a result, minor knowledge from a micro-*environmental* perspective, has been neglected or purposefully not focused on, because it falls outside the traditional scope of what Micro-history is and how it was originally defined. This also holds true, for example, for the urban built and non-built environments. Therefore, it seems more productive that ‘it is reasonable to apply a looser definition of microhistory’ as Magnússon and Szijártó (2013: 37) already wrote some time ago.

Such an approach is in response to the now longstanding requests for, and widely accepted recognition of interdisciplinary approach also in Historical Studies (Ledda 2015: 1). These calls are nowadays less disputed. The following example will suffice for the purposes here:

The problem of climate change forces us to rethink many of the basic analytical categories in the humanities and humanistic social sciences. Within the humanities, writers and artists are experimenting with new ways in which their practices can catalyze environmental awareness, and emerging research is beginning to integrate the history of culture with the history of the earth's climate (Johnson 2016: 1).

But apart from method and epistemology, there is another fundamentally far-reaching consideration that compels researchers to think differently. For R. Patel and J.W. Moore (2017: 2) the situation is dire: ‘We need an intellectual state shift to accompany our new epoch’ to deal with the near-disastrous current state of our collective (only) *world ecology* of this Planet. The implication is that the human and non-human worlds – the environment – built *and* non-built, are too important to be left to environmental sciences alone. Environmental History has responded to this stark reality, as do the Environmental Humanities (O’Gorman *et al.* 2019: 427–460). To be more specific: Andrew Biro explained that all ecologies are *critical* ecologies, and accordingly, when Fabio Parascandolo (2016: 9) wrote that the ‘multi-facetted crises of our times [are] actually entangled in a bundle of planetary crisis’, then it is logic to include the gains from *Minor Knowledge* into Micro- Enviro-history *praxis*.

In line with the application of the concept ‘minor knowledge’, Micro- Enviro-historians can do well to keep in mind that the environmental and Conservation Sciences tell us, that ‘by the end of [this] century we will need several Earths. But we cannot have several Earths, and so we will face a future of increasing poverty, food shortages, conflict and environmental degradation’ (Carwardine 2020: 27) if we continue to live our lives in the ways we currently do. Climate change, pollution, deforestation, biodiversity loss, water and food shortages, and population growth, are only some of the usual and most popular and traditionally referred to human ill effects on the planet. In this context, James Fair (2020: 28) makes a strong case for an old and destructive human endeavour: war.

Not so long ago, the world agreed that humans could destroy all forms of life with bombs – THE bomb. But in less than seventy years the focus shifted to mass destruction and extinction – not through Weapons of Mass Destruction, but through human excessive over-accumulation (not over-consumption). This is because humankind accumulates faster and more than we need to and can consume. Military hunting and poaching of e.g. antelopes, giraffes and other big game (depending where war is waged) to provide war-food for warring soldiers, have forced certain animal species in East

Africa to the brink of extinction often slaughtering far more than was needed for the pot. What have we accumulated in *this* process? Some might argue that we accumulated nothing since everything was destroyed. In fact, we over-accumulated the *power* to destroy, and there are many more examples on this Planet.

What have these got to do with *Minor Knowledge*? Quite a lot, as it turned out. For now, I purposefully refrain from referring to lessons we are already learning from the Covid-19 pandemic.

Or so the conventional thinking goes, viz that humans control the non-human world through all kinds of key conceptual tools of domination (Engelbrecht 2014: 1–17): science, religion, capitalism, imperialism, class structure, gender inequalities, fake news, post-truth *praxis* (Engelbrecht 2019b: 1–43) or through a two-world binary of this world: First World or Third World. In such a ‘two-world world’, everything is reduced to the concentration of capital in the hands of the elite – the capitalist – preferably and simplistically white colonialist monopoly capitalists (Engelbrecht 2018b: 1–39; Engelbrecht 2018c: 1–30). But even *that* is no longer true: it is through access to power: state-power, to be more specific, that people access material means, in other words, control of the safe’s keys or password or pin codes. The safe’s keys, or passwords, or pin codes are no longer *that* which they are designed or intended for and supposed to be. Instead, they *are* ‘power’.

Magnússon and Ólafsson (2019: 1) argue that *Minor Knowledge* ‘outlines particular features of education and communication during the long nineteenth century in a global perspective.’ Their valuable claim is not only in favour of minor knowledge on a global scale but simultaneously of *longue durée* nature. This is different when for instance, compared to G.R. Stewart’s objectives in his *Pickett’s Charge A Microhistory of the Final Attack at Gettysburg, July 3, 1863*, that covers a period of only about fourteen hours – a *le petit durée*, probably? This alone, shows the difference in procedures, experiences, and content in creating, transmitting, and preserving research outputs of Micro- Enviro-history.

Modern everyday life, so different from the manuscript culture that Magnússon and Ólafsson studied in *Minor Knowledge*, is characterized by the use of everyday mobile technology – mobile phones, tablets, digital cameras, drones, etc – that their individual and collective impact on Micro- Enviro-history is vastly different from times that pre-date the current digital era. And just when we think we have mastered Magnússon concept of an ego-document, our first-year students remind us that actually we must also include the memory storage facilities of mobile phones (and the rest) as techno-documents.

New potential of ‘in-between spaces’ (Magnússon and Ólafsson 2019: 2) where instant communicative action takes place on numerous social media platforms with millions of applications through countless search engines, the ‘scribal community’ (Magnússon and Ólafsson 2019: 1) of ‘barefoot historians’ (Magnússon and Ólafsson 2019: 2) transforms and transmits strategic alliances in modern instant ‘*rhizomic* networks’ (Magnússon and Ólafsson 2019: 2, emphasis in original) across the

world at incomprehensible speeds – complete with images or voice recordings as proof put forward as seemingly authoritative, when a hand goes up to draw attention to – ‘texting communities’. The

peasant “lay scholars,” largely self-educated and self-motivated, each working independently in his or her own part of the country with their own particular areas of interest, collectively formed an informal network that had great influence over popular culture in the rural regions (Magnússon and Ólafsson 2019: 2–3).

These are more important views for the purposes of determining what value *Minor Knowledge* can potentially be for Micro- Enviro-history. A few questions in relation to Micro- Enviro-history, come to mind. If the above are correct, how does the ‘barefoot historian’ of today look like in the broader global village as a modern ‘scribal community’ wherever they are? And where are their members – 09:00 in Cape Town, then earlier than that the following day in London? And how does one identify and explain such ‘*rhizomic* networks’? What is the impact of these informal institutional connections on the ‘formal rules and procedure of dominant social institutions’ and ‘the regulation of [future human] society’? (Magnússon and Ólafsson 2019: 3).

There is (still following Magnússon and Ólafsson) a further *value* that can be gleaned and applied from microhistory: ‘there is an advantage to looking outside the conventional framework of historical research and considering new material’ that Magnússon and Ólafsson (2019: 3) named “minor knowledge”. One such area that hosts an increasing volume and diverse treasure trove of minor knowledge, is mobile social media. Suffice to say, with its immense power to storage and retrieval capacities (to name only two), archiving today is something totally different from only three decades ago. It is different on many levels, and to make it more interesting and challenging, all at the same time. It transforms the concept ‘scribal community’ into a ‘texting community’. The view here is that it changes the concept of ‘barefoot historians’ potentially to what Dale Wright (2011) terms as ‘citizen scientists.’ But it does give new impetus to the word ‘archive’, and of course to terminology such as ‘space’, ‘place’ and ‘speed’. ‘Brainstorming’ becomes almost irrelevant – and there is no limit to new ideas (material) on social media between members of the same community and members of other communities at the same time all over the world. As a result, potentially hundreds of different versions of the same idea, fractured over hundreds of virtual locations across the world at any given moment in time, is now a reality. One example will suffice. Right now (on 20 May 2020) there are millions of different ideas about Covid-19 and humankind’s questionable responses to its spread among many thousands of locations involving billions of people across one Planet. It is speculated that in less than

five months, approximately 40 million Americans have lost their jobs and in South Africa the preliminary estimates point at between 7 and 9 million additional jobless people.

If it is fair to say that Micro- Enviro-history also deals with *local* environmental phenomena, then Magnússon and Ólafsson's (2019: 5) reference to Clifford Geertz's term 'local knowledge' is most useful for Enviro- Micro-history. This represents a further value of *Minor Knowledge*. The argument is as follows: 'Geertz uses the term *local knowledge* to describe the experience of reality that originates in people's day-to-day lives—knowledge that is easy to acquire, retain, and apply' (Magnússon and Ólafsson's 2019: 5, emphasis in original). This is because 'within the local environment lies knowledge that is not to be found elsewhere' (Magnússon and Ólafsson 2019: 5). Like Geertz's emphasis is on 'thick description', and that the 'understanding of life so gained, should then be transferable and applied to larger societies' (Magnússon and Ólafsson 2019: 5), is equally true for Enviro- Micro-history. This means that local environmental knowledge of a local village for instance, 'displays general characteristics' (Magnússon and Ólafsson 2019: 5) that are similar to those identifiable in the work of those historians that conform to the micro-historical methodology.

But Micro- Enviro-history can also benefit from *Minor Knowledge* in a very particular way from the difference of opinion in a debate that Magnússon and Ólafsson take part. It is from 'the traditional boundaries and standardized processes of scholarship into unexplored areas of "local knowledge" [that] we can hope to come across material that may shed new light on institutional structures and thus force us to question our received and accepted notions of them' (Magnússon and Ólafsson 2019: 4). Then, with the advent of globalization in the 1990s, large numbers of scholars

chose to abandon "the village" in the last quarter of the twentieth century and venture[d] out into the wide world ... in line with the demands of the prevailing "global perspective" in business, politics, culture and the sciences. As a result the dominant forces in the world of historiography came to downplay, and even ignore, knowledge that existed in the setting of local culture. [...] only now as a paradigm of something that was outmoded, narrow-minded, and to be rejected (Magnússon and Ólafsson 2019: 6).

One can then ask: 'What happened next'? Magnússon and Ólafsson (2019: 7) explained in detail as follows:

In an attempt to counter this broad sense of disorientation, members of the public started to take a keener interest in the importance of personal expression and experience and, in particular, to look more closely into their own individual

experience of the past. Similar pressures were felt within the scholarly community; the last years of the twentieth century saw many historians rejecting the grand narratives and turning to small, delimited areas of research, investigating the fragments that have come down to us from the past in the closes detail possible. The route to the “village” was the route “home,” so to speak—since it is there that one might hope to encounter material capable of casting a prevailing light on the past. The big picture seems to have lost its appeal as an instructive template against which to look at past time.

So, researchers have available to them new places (e.g. social media) and types of resources (e.g. ego-documents) to contend with – it poses similar challenges for Micro- Enviro-historians. This brings elements of revisionism to enviro- micro-historical research agendas. In other words, Micro-history has the potential to influence creative thinking of contemporary Micro- Enviro-historians along the principles of leaving, in the words of Magnússon and Ólafsson (2019: 4, 9), ‘the traditional boundaries and standardized processes of scholarship into unexpected areas of “local knowledge”’. In this way enviro- micro-historical ‘methodological innovation or an approach that is based on the conviction that the especially detailed, or through historical investigation of a relatively circumscribed unit of analysis ... can give the que toward solving their comprehensive problems.’

And to borrow from Magnússon and Ólafsson (2019: 9), then one way in which comprehensive problems can be solved is by considering

research methods applied by microhistory [that] can provide opportunities for discussion about the past on the level of what might be termed *in-between spaces*—gray areas that open up between the institutions themselves and the people connected with them.

This value from *Minor Knowledge* fits in well with enviro- micro-historical challenges in presenting its empirical research outputs. The implication is that such needs to be done in full view of challenges faced to presenting arguments in enviro- micro-historical contextual and methodological nature of its own. Two examples will suffice.

Magnússon and Ólafsson (2019: 1) explain that through studying manuscript exchange, traditional views about ‘the development of literacy, education, and communication in the world’ could be questioned. The argument persists that learning in *Minor Knowledge* about micro-historical procedures, experiences, and content about the everyday, can be beneficial to Micro- Enviro-history. Understanding oral culture for instance, so deeply entrenched in Micro-history, can be valuable, for instance, in

studying extreme rainfall events and the effects thereof on local communities. By all accounts, extreme rainfall events as examples of the *normal exception*, makes good sense for Micro- Enviro-history.

A second key micro-historical concept is the ‘singularization of micro-history.’ Singularization aims at addressing the past in a diverse manner without being restricted by predetermined analytical categories of grand narratives (Magnússon and Ólafsson 2019: 59). Magnússon (2003: 1–32) published a paper in 2003: ‘*The Singularization of History: Social History and Microhistory Within the Postmodern State of Knowledge*’, and reference here, is to only three aspects:

the singularization of history is first and foremost a search for a way in which history can research its proper subjects in their proper logical and cultural context and thus disassociate itself from the “manmade” ideological package of the metanarratives.

However determinedly I would urge scholars to turn away from the metanarratives and their stifling presence within the traditional research community, I am well aware that it is no easy matter to discard the scientific paradigms of academia – the discipline’s rules of play – and start afresh with the slate wiped clean (Magnússon 2003: 20).

[Lastly], the singularization of history does not require historians to reject earlier scholarship, not to believe that previous ideological systems are to be case aside without regard. Quite the contrary; it is vital to initiate a debate on metanarratives and to recognize that this debate has a place in the society we live. But the limitations of such paradigms must be faced, and the paradigms themselves should not be the direct subject of research. This is the heart of the singularization of history (Magnússon 2003: 21).

The importance of the above three citations is to show not only a further conceptual gain from *Micro Knowledge* but also the complexity of the potential debate that Enviro- Micro-history might find itself. At the same time, however, it does warn, as Max Horkheimer (1968: v) did, that the ‘[t]houghtless and dogmatic application of the critical theory practice in changed historical circumstances’, is essentially anachronistic. Such would have been tantamount to have overlooked evaluation criteria for new methods so support interdisciplinary environmental research.

Through studying the scribal manuscripts produced and left behind by barefoot historians and therefore learning a lot about the ‘everyday writing practices among ordinary people in a poor rural society’ (Magnússon and Ólafsson 2019: i), it becomes self-evident that it cannot stand separate from its own particular natural environmental context. *Minor Knowledge* is full of either direct or indirect

references thereto. But the people, be they the poor peasant barefoot historians or not, all exist within the binary of lived experiences between ‘two poles of social structure and individual agency’ (Magnússon and Ólafsson 2019: 2). Not only did peasant lay scholars ‘collectively form ... an informal network that had great influence over popular culture in the rural regions’, but they were also ‘not regulated by the formal rules and procedures of dominant social institutions....’ Instead, they functioned within a space somewhere within the ‘restrained and limited practices of a formal educational system not only impelled by dominant ideologies like Pietism and Enlightenment’ on the one hand, but they were furthermore dampened by ‘society’s economic and social conditions and constructions’ (Magnússon and Ólafsson 2019: 3), on the other. The scribal community had to contend with the local (micro) and national or state level (macro), and with formal or informal, institutional, or non-institutional epistemologies. This means that they had to deal with dominant forces that tended to downplay or even neglect the local. The reality was that such mainstream narratives commanded dominant positions, from thought processes of mainstream scholarship to government, politics, economy, class, gender (to name only a few) considerations (Magnússon and Ólafsson 2019: 4–6). I argue that these ‘endless contradictions, incongruities, oddities, and unmotivated events that characterize people’s daily lives’ (Magnússon and Ólafsson 2019: 6) are relevant for application to micro- environ-historical analyses. Because historiographical and theoretical foundations can set the scene for empirical micro- enviro-historical findings. Such interdisciplinary approach recognizes that although the subjects are dissimilar, ‘there are many cases of productive collaboration and reciprocal influence[s] between different branches of the scholarly’ work (Magnússon and Ólafsson 2019: 22). For example, more than a decade ago, Edward Muir (2007: loc 44) explained a similar methodology in his study of the Late Renaissance history of Venice, when he brought together ‘modern principles of the history of science, philosophy, literature, religion and music.’ An added value is that such outcomes would go a long way to at least address Irina Bokova’s concerns.

In a recent study about the rainfall history on a farm in the Eastern Cape (South Africa), Engelbrecht (2018a: 1–33) argued that the description of particular events, such as analysing site-specific rainfall history at a micro-level, can help to understand some rainfall characteristics, e.g. the amount of rain, the duration of rainfall events, the distribution frequency and intensity of rainfall at the sub-annual level of analysis. This brings traditional characteristics of Micro-history in close proximity of Micro- Enviro-history and the latter in the orbit of Environmental Humanities.

Studying empirical data of rainfall history and predictions from a Micro- Enviro-history approach of a specific or confined site brings traditional micro-historical language such as size, or the micro-macro link/s of the local relative to regional or national geo-space forward for consideration. Micro-historical analysis of the results of near- and far-future rainfall predictions, implies the potential for Micro- Enviro-history to isolate one climatic condition for in-depth close-scrutiny analysis. Such

singularization of history does not stand separate from description of the harsh climatic conditions under which barefoot historians lived and conducted their manuscript writing. A detailed analysis of the rainfall history of this farm, revealed unexpected results, for instance the recording and lived experiences during and after extreme rainfall events and the extent to which they are part of exceptional normal local climatic conditions.

But Micro- Enviro-historians will be well aware of the pitfalls of the merely ‘copy and pasting’ conceptual exchange from piles of books that are seemingly of no relevance. They would, I hope, be receptive to the value of *Minor Knowledge* in particular, and an expanded *praxis* of ‘historians of all sorts’, that would also review the traditional territoriality of Micro-history as too restrictive.

In a sense, this leaves open the *necessity* for Micro-history to work closer with Micro- Enviro-history.

The opening sentence of Richard Blundell (2015:1) ‘[t]hat the advantages and disadvantages of microhistory are not inherent within the method but rather are contingent upon the question that is being answered’, is an apt final comment for this discussion.

Conclusion

Driscoll’s review of *Minor Knowledge* did not draw nearly enough attention to the substantive issues of this important publication.

And if, according to Cohen, microhistory can be beneficial to all kinds of histories, then Franco’s (2017: 1) use of methodological pluralism and transdisciplinary, pushes, for example, critical ecologies well into the realm of Micro- Enviro- history research. It is in this in-between spaces of Microhistory on the one hand and Enviro-history on the other, that Micro- Enviro-history does not have to be practiced from neither ‘a top-down nor a bottom-up perspective, but [be] focussed squarely on everyday dynamics at work “on the ground”’ (Bergersen and Schmieding 2017: 1). In so doing, Microhistory can contribute to a step change towards broadening the areas of focus of microhistorical research without compromising original tenets, to include the non-human environmental life. Thus, it would be able to live up to transformative necessities. Such is a minimum condition for Microhistory, given the claims of its seemingly favoured position between Social and Cultural Histories. The most important reason is probably: humankind’s current real-life lived-experiences (also) from the-ground-up, that leave *all* sciences with hardly *any* alternative/s but to be revisionist. If, first-generation microhistorians had particular interest in ‘cultural and social outliers’ (Penner 2009), they neglected investment in the environmental – they now (because it is never too late), have an opportunity to redress the imbalances of the past since there are certainly no shortages of environmental outliers that can gain from Micro-Enviro-historical research outcomes (Engelbrecht 2019a).

One such possibility is to re-invest in the historical comparative historical method, specifically at micro-level. The work by Muriel Blaive (2011) underscores this view. Although in a different context, Blaive (2013: 91, 92, 93) concluded: Although ‘individual cases are each in their way “peculiar” [...] that when the national question was concerned, the communist rulers could hold completely contradictory positions in order to negotiate separate, but effective public transcripts adapted to local contexts.’ Secondly, Blaive concluded that ‘[t]he comparative microhistorical method ... shows on a more general level that communism and nationalism went hand in hand despite the propaganda on proletarian internationalism that characterized communist ideology on the surface.’ The following and last reference to Blaive’s conclusions, underlines the point:

Comparative microstudies can triangulate the issues of concern and sources of legitimacy at any given scale (town, region, nation, country, the Eastern bloc, Europe) that are at the core of this social relationship. All levels contribute a different and useful viewpoint, and all need to be practiced.

This type of *praxis* can build an historical method that lays out to veer the principles of micro-historical research achievements into an advantage for teaching and writing (Cohen 2019) Micro- Enviro- history, or might it just be that micro-environmental history (Myllyntaus 2020: 6) might be the beneficiary. And in this, lies the fundamental value of *Minor Knowledge*.

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